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Narrative lead

ZIMBABWE (CQ), BULAWAYO (CQ) – When Rutendo Mhlanga travelled on a bus from to South Africa, passengers agreed to contribute money to give to customs officials at the border so they could avoid having their luggage searched.

The tactic reaped huge benefits for Mhlanga and others who transport retail or resale items across the border. No one took stock of the goods she was moving, so she didn't have to pay taxes on any of it.

"The practice is so engrained in our society. We fuel it," the self-employed clothing vendor says. "We actually offer bribes before they are asked for."

This is life in Zimbabwe, from the most local levels to the nation's highest political office. Only 23 countries, out of a total of 180 are perceived as more corrupt than Zimbabwe, according to rankings collected by Transparency International, a corruption watchdog organization. (CQ LINK)

Corruption is common across all sectors in Zimbabwe, but the problem is especially serious when it comes to police agencies, the public service sector, including land and tax administration, according to data collected by GAN Integrity, a business-focused corruption monitor. (CQ LINK)

Police often block roads to extort travellers, that data shows. (CQ_LINK)

A quarter of the people who needed identity documents, such as a driver's license or passport, paid bribes to get them, according to data collected by Afrobarometer (CQ LINK pg 1), a pan-African research network.

A 2017 survey by Afrobarometer found that 35 percent of all urban Zimbabweans surveyed don't trust the police at all. (CQ LINK pg 25) Nearly half of all rural Zimbabweans surveyed say that at least some government officials and local government councillors are involved in corruption. (CQ LINK pg. 27)

The presidential election on July 30 is all about regaining legitimacy among other nations, says Samukele Hadebe, a senior researcher at Chris Hani Institute, but major changes are needed in ordinary life in Zimbabwe order for that to happen.

“Corruption in Zimbabwe poses the worst threat to governance and socio-economic development,” he says.

Proper management of the election is key to showing the rest of the world that Zimbabwe is ready to change, he adds.

Under Robert Mugabe, who led Zimbabwe for nearly 40 years, election fraud was assumed. Mugabe not only violently quelled protest movements (CQ LINK), he also repeatedly rigged elections. (CQ LINK)

The candidates, which include current President Emmerson Mnangagwa and the primary opposition candidate Nelson Chamisa, must ensure that nothing of the sort occurs on either side, Hadebe says.

“If one wins through the use of violence, vote buying and any form of rigging then that person is unlikely to take the country out of the scourge of corruption and poverty,” he says.

There is hope that the government will work to eradicate corruption if Chamisa’s party, the Movement for Democratic Change, wins the election, says SH, a Zimbabwe Revenue Authority official who asked not to be named for fear of retribution.

SH acknowledged that many of the revenue authority’s employees are corrupt for very practical reasons.

“They are underpaid,” SH says.

It’s not only government workers who engage in corruption, says Khumbulani Ndlovu, a commuter omnibus driver.

“In our business we are at times forced to pay bribes to police officers at roadblocks and we also pay because we want to operate and be able to feed our families,” Ndlovu says.

Farai Kizito Manganda, a candidate for a local constituency race in Bulawayo, says the fact that the government is filled with people who were part of Mugabe’s administration is a major part of the problem.

“The same dirty hands have no capacity to clean up the mess,” Manganda says.

Language note: No language note needed.

CAPTION:

CUTS and REPHRASES:

“Everyone is corrupt, even politicians so whoever wins, it won’t make a difference,” says Khumbulani Ndlovu, a commuter omnibus driver. “In our business we are at times forced to pay bribes to police officers at roadblocks and we also pay because we want to operate and be able to feed our families.”

Election period is always tricky because this is the time when politicians are trying to win votes but as soon they are in power they only pretend to change things yet they are doing nothing, says Sean Moyo, a 25-year-old youth who has just completed an undergraduate degree from a local university.

“Corruption is easy to root,” she says. “Most employees (at Zimra) are corrupt because they are underpaid, considering Zimra jobs are for safeguarding revenue. The workers should be paid a salary which will discourage them from taking bribes.”

If ZANU PF wins these elections, corruption will be worse, but if MDC wins, there might be a change for the better as it will be a new government with different policies, says an official at the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, Zimra who requested anonymity for fear of retribution and preferred to be called SH.

The 2018 elections will be about Zimbabwe regaining legitimacy among the community of nations and the presidential elections precisely point in that direction even if most aspirants are new after the departure of both Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai, says Dr Samukele Hadebe, a senior researcher at Chris Hani Institute.

“Corruption in Zimbabwe poses the worst threat to governance and socio-economic development,” he says. “The 2018 elections are therefore about restoring legitimacy through proper political governance including electoral management.”

Nothing will change after elections until government makes it easy and accessible to get services like getting a passport, bir

th certificate and other documents, says Mhlanga.

The issue of corruption in Zimbabwe has always been a hot potato and has always been used by political parties as a campaign tool. Residents say corruption is too engrained in the society, it may be difficult to deal with, while others say it can be dealt with as long as there is political will at government level. The way forward is for those charged with corruption to be prosecuted and for all Zimbabweans to work together to reduce it.

Background context

Local Voices

Another 2017 report, Afrobarometer, which is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in countries across Africa, states that thirty-five percent of urban dwellers do not trust police at all. (Afrobarometer 2017, document uploaded, Q43G section).

Sixteen percent of urban dwellers do not at all trust courts of law. (Afrobarometer, Q43I). Thirty-one percent do not trust the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, (Q43L).

The report also says thirty-two percent of people believe that most members of Parliament are corrupt (Q44B), forty-seven percent of rural dwellers believe that most government officials are involved in corruption. (Q44C),

“The biggest contributors to corruption is the public,” says Rutendo Mhlanga, a self-employed resident who buys and sells clothes. “The practise is so engrained in our society we fuel it. We actually offer bribes before they are asked for.”

For example, passengers travelling from South Africa to Bulawayo start organising money among themselves to pay customs officials at the Beit-bridge border so that their luggage is not searched.

Most people who travel to South Africa or to other neighbouring countries are cross boarder traders who make a living by buying cheaper clothes and goods in neighbouring countries for resale in their countries.

These traders are expected to pay tax for bulk items they bring into the country. However, to avoid paying the taxes, they organise money and give the driver who then pays the customs officials to allow the bus or passengers on certain buses to pass through the border without being searched, says Mhlanga

News Value